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Senator John Cauthorn Co-Sponsors Competitive Bidding Bill

Open Contracting Act Levels The Playing Field For Private Sector Contractors

State Senator John Cauthorn, R-Mexico, is co-sponsoring an economy-growing legislative proposal reining in and reversing the corrosive powers of “project labor agreements.”

“PLAs are organized labor’s ham-fisted, cost-boosting mandates imposed on non-union builders of civic projects,” Cauthorn said. “They skew the nature of open competition and trash the once generally accepted and widely practiced concept of fair play.”

Senate Bill 736 establishes the “Open Contracting Act,” which prohibits cities, counties and the state from imposing PLA and PLA-type labor requirements as conditions for building public works projects.

“Making project contractors hire most, if not all, of their workers from union halls and forcing participation in collective bargaining agreements are just a few of the damaging components of PLAs,” Cauthorn said. “All these mandates exponentially jack up the price of public projects, which those ultimately footing the bills – the taxpayers – deservedly expect and rightly demand be built at the lowest possible cost.”

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Cauthorn readily allows that organized labor played a part in improving employee conditions in the beginning decades of the 20th century, but steadfastly affirms that the reach of unions has since swung too far, to the point where businesses, revenues and jobs are leaving the state.

“What those of us in office must do is make sure that all people, all groups and all interests are treated with genuine equality,” said Cauthorn. “Contractors are well within their rights to operate as union shops. Those choosing not to shouldn’t be saddled with business-losing penalties.”

The Small Business, Insurance and Industrial Relations Committee, which Cauthorn vice-chairs, will hold public hearings on the pro-business, field-leveling proposal in the days to come. Committee approval sends the measure to the Senate floor for debate by the full body. Senate passage sends the bill to the House for similar scrutiny. Should SB 736 earn joint passage, as Cauthorn believes will happen, the bill goes to the governor, who can sign into law, or veto the proposal.

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